

IndyCar Media Days

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Scott Dixon

Media Day Presser



Q. Kind of recap 2016 and then transition into what you're looking forward to this season.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, 2016 was a challenging year on lots of different fronts. Definitely missed a few races I think that we should have done a lot better at. I think St. Pete was a rough one with overheating when we were fighting for the top three. Road America, engine failure, or mechanical failure of some sort. Toronto, strategy. I don't know, I think when I look back on 2016, we could have won at least another three or four races. For us it was probably one of our worst performances across the board. Finishing sixth in the championship I think was the first time out of the top three in about 10 or 12 years. So that was definitely frustrating, but good motivation for 2017.

Big changes for us. I think there's only two teams that changed manufacturer, ourselves and Foyt. A steep learning curve in a somewhat stagnant development year, so it's going to be interesting, but definitely excited for the change, and I know the team is super excited about the upcoming year with Honda.

Q. How critical is it for you to get a fast start, given who they have over at Team Penske in that lineup?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, Team Penske is always going to be a tough battle. You know, I find like any championship that we're fighting for, one of those drivers is in the thick of it, as well. Starting strong is a goal that we obviously try to do, but has not really been our MO for quite a few years. I think if we could start the season strong, it would definitely make the rest of it a lot more enjoyable.

But yeah, you know, it is what it is. I think for us, maybe the tracks that we have coming up first are going to be sort of eye openers for a few reasons with the change of manufacturer, just I think with street courses and maybe some short ovals. They could be our tougher ones, yeah.

Q. How do you go about changing your preparation or just managing your time when it comes to switching manufacturers to make sure that you're ready to compete at the level that you want to compete at?

SCOTT DIXON: I think it changes on many different fronts. You know, Chevrolet was more of a turnkey operation, and they offered quite a bit of support. Honda is a little more raw, but can be tailored quite a

lot. I think that's definitely a big change from what we've had for the last three years. But I think that's also good for motivation.

But yeah, I think the first -- since the transition happened and then obviously the first month leading up to it, October, November, lots of meetings and trying to understand maybe the downsides of what we need to improve on, but I think for us, too, with such a bad season for us in '16, it was definitely a good year to sit down, sort of look back and understand in a lot of areas where we were not as efficient, making a lot more mistakes than we should as a team.

So I think the two of those factor into maybe a little more -- a lot more focus, and hopefully getting back to a lot of the basics and doing them better, which I think will help us with consistency and performance throughout the year.

Q. There's a lot of talk about the halo and things, the head protection devices. It doesn't sound like it's on the first wave coming in 2018. What's your thoughts on that, and is that something you would like to see the series push a little harder for?

SCOTT DIXON: You know, I know they're working hard on it. It's definitely a work in progress and obviously has been for quite some time, and I think we've seen with Formula 1, they've had a few snags that maybe they didn't really anticipate, obviously, with sight, line of vision has become a big issue of now, and I think you'll see some changes in their halos because of that and creating blind spots a lot bigger than they thought initially were going to be a problem.

I think IndyCar, from the stuff I've seen, is in a different direction to what they have as far as a halo, probably more of a screen implementation with some pretty trick materials.

Yeah, I think '18 is kind of the goal right now, and they were talking about possible sort of running situations at the end of '17 to see how it works. But I know that they're gearing up to try and -- I don't know the timeline on it, but at some point running it on a simulator to make sure that they can cycle a few drivers there to actually --

Q. Is it a hot button item amongst the drivers? Is it

something you talk about yourselves?

SCOTT DIXON: Safety, yeah, for sure. I think there's areas that safety can be achieved quite quickly, and then there's areas that take a lot more thought. It's easy to apply things but not totally understand the consequences of what could happen in different scenarios. So I think with these big changes and something that's going to push a pretty large safety item forward has to be managed quite well and understood fully before it can just be thrown out there.

Q. The combination of Chip Ganassi Racing, Honda and you, have always been traditionally good at Indy. Is there any extra or added confidence heading into the month of May knowing that track record?

SCOTT DIXON: Well, I'd like to think that we -- outside of this year, we always have a pretty good -- outside of '16, we always have a pretty good shot at Indy. This year was very frustrating in the fact that we just really didn't have the speed on the outside. But yeah, I think with what we saw, especially out of all the Hondas last year, they were very, very strong at Pocono and the Indy 500.

I'm sure that came into partial thoughts of making the decision for the switch maybe. I don't know. But there's two things that we set goals for, and that's to win the championship and win the Indianapolis 500. I hope that's true.

Q. Penske is Ganassi's biggest rival; is it better or not better for you guys to have a different package than them?

SCOTT DIXON: Personally I think it's better to have a different package. You know, for the good of the sport, too. I think it's good maybe to get two marquee teams with different pieces. So yeah, I think with -- it's hard to get into kind of the technical side of it, but yeah, I think for us as a team, I think it's a better fit, too.

Q. Scott, along that line, you won two races last year and Team Penske won ten of them. What is your team going to have to do to really challenge them, and who do you see will be the -- I don't want to say the best but maybe the most competitive Honda team? Do you think Ganassi can rise to that?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, I think we can rise to that for sure. Obviously so many other teams have had their equipment for three years now, or two or three years. You know, it is, as I commented on, it's going to be a steep learning curve for two of the teams, which -- and with how the rules are right now with the limited track testing, it makes it even more difficult. I think we get four off-season days or something, which is not much when you get six months of the year off to be honest.

That's definitely a tough part.

I think had it been last year with the amount of testing that we had last year, it would have been a smoother transition. Not to say it would have been any different, but it would have maybe been smoother.

You know, I think with us as a team, there was a lot of missed opportunities last year, and that was by missing basic things. I think as long as we get to a lot of the -- back to the basics in some areas and focus on some deficits that we had, I think we can definitely make that number a lot nicer to look at.

Q. You hear a lot about how the Honda aero kit was a lot draggier than the Chevy. I know you've only tested it once; is that something you feel right away?

SCOTT DIXON: It's hard because I tested like the first week of January, and the last time I was in the car was at Sonoma which was four months earlier or something.

You know, overlays and things like that, you can pick up on things quite quickly, but if you look at statistics and the data that you have every weekend at these tracks and segment times, you know exactly where the deficits are. It's not like we went into something not knowing the areas we need to improve, but I think through the winter we've found some good gains. Whether it's enough at some places, maybe not, but we know where the weaknesses are.

Q. Does it make you confident with the engineering group that you've got that Honda maybe allows you to play around a little bit more with what you've got? You've got Chris Simmons and Todd Malloy and Eric Cowdin. Is that a group that you feel confident in that can come up with something that maybe another Honda team hasn't come up with?

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah, you know, I think our engineering group and the advance engineering group, it's definitely a very solid package. I think for them it's probably quite exciting in that they have something new and different to work on. And it's always exciting because when you first start on something new, you find big gains. When you're looking for a pound or two or three here and there and then you start finding 20s and 30s, that's a lot more fun.

So yeah, I think the early part, obviously once we get into running in the season and see where we really are, maybe struggling is going to be a different kind of story. But yeah, this team thrives on those kinds of things, so I think, yeah, the people that we have or that Chip has at his team are very capable for one, but also enjoy the atmosphere.

Q. Mike Hull said that when you went to Sebring, it was almost like you had to relearn everything because of the Honda. How much of that is the engineering department going to really have to -- he says you can throw out the books because they don't really apply anymore.

SCOTT DIXON: Yeah. I think obviously lots of things still apply. Your baseline setups, obviously the aero kit is a totally different animal and something that's new to all of us. You always think you know a bit about the competition, but then when reality strikes, there's areas that you maybe didn't understand as well. But no, I think there's -- you always -- there's things that we know through the years from using other manufacturers that will maybe help the current program that we're on now. You can't throw anything out as such.

I know with Mike, he's probably more describing that you've got to start from zero and relearn a lot of the ways and maybe the things that you're kind of stuck in. So yeah, you know, I think it's -- yeah, it's going to be challenging, man. There's no question about it. But challenges are fun. Hopefully.